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WASHINGTON LETTER.

WASHINGTON, D. C., FEBRUARY 15, 1898.

APPROPRIATION BILLS.—Beyond the temporary interest aroused by the unprecedented cold and snow blockade the chief topics of geographic and scientific concern are those tied up with the belated appropriation bills now before Congress. The Sundry Civil bill still before the House contains the usual items for surveys and examinations; with a few increases demanded by the new possessions. It is hoped that facilities will be afforded for mapping Porto Rico and possibly making a beginning in Cuba. For the Philippines little is expected, beyond reports to be prepared by the commissioners, appointed by executive order, or the reports of army officers and civilian associates, detailed as has been Dr. George F. Becker, the geologist now at or near Manila. Only 15 days remain before the expiration of the 55th Congress, and nearly all the great measures of national importance are in apparently chaotic condition. Some of these, like the Nicaragua Canal bill, may be placed as “riders” upon the Sundry Civil or River and Harbor bill and thus be forced through in spite of opposition.

COMMERCIAL GEOGRAPHY.—Almost unknown to the geographers of the country there has arisen a geographical exhibit which, conducted on business principles, has reached a surprising growth and development. This is the Philadelphia Commercial Museum, at present occupying the spacious buildings on Fourth street, Philadelphia, formerly used by the Pennsylvania Railroad as its general offices. The rooms are crowded with exhibits arranged by countries, and by manufacturers showing the goods manufactured in other countries than our own and exported to countries where our own goods come in competition; that is, there are shown not only the products and arts of, for example, Mexico, but also the goods which are now being made in England, Germany, and other European countries and sold in the Mexican market. The importance of such an exhibit can be shown by a single instance. A Connecticut manufacturer of cutting tools wishes to extend his trade to Australia. He must know the quality, shape, and price of the goods now selling in the markets there. At the Museum he can see samples of these with the prices and can ascertain all the technical points, say, of the various sheep shears preferred in Australia.

The Museum exhibit is, however, only the foundation for the work of the Institution. Based largely upon these, various lines of work have been taken up for giving specific information accurately and quickly. It is not sufficient for the merchant to know what were the conditions last year or the year before, but for guidance he must have the very latest facts as to character of commodities, tariffs and local conditions. These are made available by the Bureau of Information actively reporting trade conditions in other countries. To the manufacturer of hardware, for example, this Bureau will furnish a full report, stating for any one or more countries the lines of hardware most saleable, where and by whom made, how much is sold and at what price, the tariffs, freights and methods of packing and suggestions concerning the business firms best fitted to undertake an agency. The general information obtained by visiting the Museum and consulting its records is free to all, but the special written reports are sent at regular intervals on payment of the expense of preparing them.

Connected with the Museum is a library of trade literature of the world with technical journals, shipping reports, statistical publications and a great variety of information needed by manufacturers and exporters. Access to these facts is facilitated by the card catalogue system, so arranged that reference can be made to individual articles or to countries.

The correspondence necessary for obtaining and sending out this information is carried on in a dozen or more languages by experts, who are either natives of the various foreign countries or have spent a large portion of their lives in the trade centres of the world. It is stated that the Museum is in correspondence with over 30,000 business houses in the United States and with about 20,000 in foreign countries. Financial support is obtained through direct appropriations made by the City of Philadelphia and by fees received from subscribers who receive regular and special reports. Plans are now being prepared for a large exhibit to be made this fall as noted below.

EXHIBITION OF FOREIGN PRODUCTS AND MANUFACTURES.—By Act of Congress, approved December 21, 1898, an appropriation of \$300,000 was made to the Philadelphia Exposition Association, to aid in providing buildings to be erected in Philadelphia for an exposition in 1899 of articles not of American manufacture, and such other objects as may be useful in comparison with American products and manufactures. In addition to this, the sum of \$50,000

was appropriated for the purpose of enabling the collection in foreign markets of samples of merchandise in demand in various countries and for illustrating the manner in which such merchandise is prepared and packed, together with information concerning these samples.

The object of this exposition is to lay the foundation of a system of national commercial education, so as to present in the most striking form possible the opportunities for foreign trade and the requirements of various nations. It is designed for business men and business purposes, and in the interest of export trade, but if carried out as planned, the exposition should be of value not only to manufacturers and jobbers, but also to students of geography in its industrial applications. The amount appropriated by the National Government is in addition to sums provided by the State of Pennsylvania, the City of Philadelphia and by various corporations and individuals; all of these coöperating in this movement. The aid of the consular service of the Government has also been secured, and special provisions made for admitting articles free of duty. A large tract of land has been donated for the purpose, and the erection of buildings is about being begun.

A NEW MINING BUREAU.—For many years a discussion has been had as to the desirability and practicability of establishing a Department of Mining, with a secretary, who should be a Cabinet officer, with duties and privileges equal to those of the Secretary of Agriculture. It has been asserted that the mining interest is as important, if not more so than the farming, and that for its stimulation and protection there should be a Government officer in a position to advise the Chief Executive and to coöperate in all the affairs of state. At various conventions the matter has been discussed, and as information has been acquired the demands for a department have gradually subsided, and most of the advocates are willing to accept a bureau under one of the existing departments, as a first step. Action has finally taken the form of a joint resolution introduced by Senator Perkins, of California, to provide for a Division of Mines and Mining in the United States Geological Survey, this being in the Department of the Interior. Mr. Perkins urges that, although the mining interests of the United States yielded during 1897 an increase of about five hundred and ninety-five million dollars, it does not have a clearly defined representation in the organization of the National Government. He further urges that such a representation is greatly needed for the purpose

of gathering and publishing statistics relating to mines and mining, including facts relating to gold and silver as mineral products, and data concerning labor employed and wages earned in the different mining operations. The resolution calls for an appropriation of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and provides that the information thus gathered may be published as regular annual reports or as special papers, the size of the edition of each being controlled by its economic importance. This legislation in effect gives a tangible nucleus for an important bureau or sub-department of the Government—greatly needed in view of the fact that the United States is still the owner of enormous tracts of land which undoubtedly contain valuable ores and minerals. The mining laws are notoriously defective, and cannot probably be improved until more complete knowledge is had by the people of the real conditions and of the remedies which should be applied.

WATER CONSERVATION.—A proposition which seems to involve a radical departure in national affairs has been made by Senator Carter of Montana in an amendment intended to be proposed to the River and Harbor Bill. This amendment authorizes the expenditure of five million dollars in building reservoirs and canals to conduct water into these from streams in the States and Territories within the arid region. Up to the present time, although the Government has spent large sums for improving navigation, there has never been any sustained or systematic effort in behalf of water conservation for other purposes. Many of the representatives from States in which there are no navigable waters have claimed that their localities should receive a share of attention in some way or other, and particularly the Western States, where, with scanty population and small returns from direct taxes, the State governments are barely able to keep up the interest on their debts. In these States the Government is the great landowner, holding from one-half to nine-tenths of the area—this land, of course, contributing nothing to the support of the State government. It is coming to be appreciated that unless the owner of the land, that is, the National Government, conserves the water for its reclamation, many of the great resources in agricultural land and in low-grade minerals cannot be utilized.

There is no probability that the proposition for conserving water within the arid region will pass the House of Representatives, for there the representation being by population, the number of Western men is relatively small. In the Senate, however, the

reverse is the case, for each State having two Senators, irrespective of population, the West holds the balance of power as between the North and the South. Thus, by united effort on the part of the Western Senators, a proposition of this kind can be forced upon the River and Harbor Bill, and in the final adjustment of differences between the House and Senate may have some chance of being retained as an item in the compromise.

It is proposed that the Government shall construct, own and operate the reservoirs and conserve or equalize the flow of water in the streams, turning it back into the natural channels, thus encouraging and facilitating the distribution of the water through the lands needing it. This distribution is to be subject to the laws and regulations of the representative States, these being already established by the respective legislatures. There is great diversity not only in natural conditions but in development of laws regarding water in the different States, some being modelled upon the English Common Law or upon the Statutes brought from the older States, while others have been the result of experience suited to the needs of the country. Thus, while in some States irrigation is encouraged, in others, as on the Pacific Coast, the diversion of water from the streams is made difficult or subject to riparian rights, the exercise of which is almost prohibitory to developments.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER FLOODS.—One of the most important of the minor reports issued by Congress having scientific or geographic bearing is that on Mississippi River Floods by the Senate Committee on Commerce. This is printed as Senate Report No. 1433 of the Fifty-fifth Congress, Third Session. It consists of only thirteen pages, but within these is condensed a review of the operations of some of the great forces of Nature. The causes of the flood are briefly reviewed, and it is shown that the greatest and most destructive have generally come from the Ohio, resulting from excessive rains in the basin of this river and its tributaries. These rains arise from cyclonic storms and warm moisture-laden winds originating in the Gulf of Mexico and passing thence up the central valley into the western slopes and spurs of the Allegheny Mountains, where a colder atmosphere is encountered, leading to heavy precipitation.

The Ohio floods, passing into the Mississippi near Cairo, are frequently reinforced by excess waters from the White and St. Francis Rivers, and other streams in the central valley. Occasion-

ally the floods from the Missouri and upper Mississippi, to a limited extent, extend or prolong high water in the lower river, but this is true mainly of the important and general freshets rather than of the earlier and more extensive floods. This fact has not been sufficiently well recognized by the public, for it is commonly claimed, in popular discussions, that by the construction of reservoirs at the head-waters of the Mississippi and Missouri the floods on the lower river might be reduced. On this point the report is explicit, in showing that a reservoir on the upper Missouri, while of value for irrigation, would have no material bearing either on the navigation of the Missouri or on the floods in the Mississippi. In the same way reservoirs on the upper Mississippi (five of which have already been constructed) have no material effect below Lake Pepin, which lies between the States of Minnesota and Wisconsin. As for reservoirs on the Ohio, it appears that there are no great basins adequate for the purpose.

One of the opinions rendered will be a source of surprise to many, as it differs radically from commonly accepted views. It is stated that nothing in the evidence or other data obtained tends to prove that the destruction of forests at or near the head-waters tends to cause greater floods. It has been so often asserted that these floods are the result of destruction of the forests, that this has come to be regarded as an established fact, and the complete negation will come as a shock to many enthusiasts. It is stated, on the contrary, that where timber is cut down and the ground not cultivated, the underbrush remains and grows more luxuriantly than before, serving to retard the movement of water on the slope. Where cleared the ploughed area becomes an enlarged absorbent of surface moisture.

The subject of levees, as might be supposed, is the one to which most attention was given. The testimony made clear that the flood of 1897 was in its effects and consequences greatly aggravated by the extensive levee construction which had taken place since the floods of 1882-83 and 1884. It was also shown that if the levees had not existed a larger area would have been submerged. There has been constructed in all nearly 165 million cubic yards of levees, costing about 48 million dollars. Of this 69 million yards were built by the United States at a cost of over 13 million dollars, and 96 million yards by the State or local authorities at a cost of 34 million dollars. To complete the entire levee system, sufficiently high and strong to afford complete protection, will cost upwards of 20 million dollars additional.

For maintaining navigation it is recommended that additional dredges be provided, rather than that large sums be expended on expensive works for maintaining the channel by revetment works. It is admitted that the latter are efficacious, but the cost is so immense that systematic application is scarcely warranted. In regard to the Missouri River, it is shown that the stream is so erratic and uncertain, that great difficulties are encountered in controlling its movements. Work in recent years has been chiefly confined to the improvement of the navigability of about 45 miles of the lower reach of the river, and to the so-called "harbor improvements" near towns. Such local improvements being isolated and unsupported are, however, usually swept away by the annual overflows. The result is that by reason of the failure to adopt systematic and continuous improvement of reaches, the condition has become so bad as to discourage navigation.

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